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Can the Barrier of Race Stay the Progress of the Kingdom?

F. Q. Blanchard

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**Can the Barrier of Race *prob*
Stay the Progress
of the
Kingdom?**

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Can the Barrier of Race Stay the Progress of the Kingdom?

The progress of Christianity has been put in jeopardy every hour by some frowning barrier. This is equivalent to saying that Christianity is not the easiest highway to follow. As a matter of fact it is the only path that really arrives at the "one far off divine event." But that knowledge does not and did not get rid of the difficulties in the way. At the outset there was the barrier of the cross. The world was not singing "In the cross of Christ I glory." But that cross was to the Greeks foolishness and to the Jews a stumbling block. Somehow it had to be made clear as a symbol of the life men craved. This was a mighty task and we marvel at the rapidity with which success was gained. There was violence to encounter, yet that was less difficult to overcome than the neglect born of contempt. Tacitus, the precise Roman historian, thought the Christian movement worthy of only a brief sentence, "The author of this superstition suffered punishment when Pilate was the governor." But indifference was at last replaced by respect and finally the symbol of shame was lifted to the pinnacle of worldly glory as it went before Constantine's victorious legions. How much the faith lost through its adoption by the State there is no need to inquire here. Enough just now to note that in three centuries the barrier of the shame of the cross had fallen.

Again there was the barrier of ignorant barbarism among the northern nations who took possession of the old Roman world. When after many centuries of Christian teaching the descendants of these peoples sent unarmed steamships to destruction without an instant's warning

to the helpless lives on board, something of the task that faced Christianity at the beginning may be understood. For there has been immeasurable progress. The wild barbaric impulses have been softened, for long periods, restraint had been exercised, and today there are tens of thousands who repudiate the diabolic doctrine of militarism for the gospel of Jesus.

And once more, we recall how the barrier of spiritual blindness among nine-tenths of the Christian people had to be overcome by the young men who heard the inarticulate yearnings of the non-Christian nations walking in the shadowed ways of their ineffectual faiths. But the spirit of the words—We can do it if we will—has lighted the lamps of Christian hope in every land, broken the shackles that bound womanhood and led the young life of the nations into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

As we dwell in retrospect upon these victorious engagements of the spirit of the gospel with forces that would have denied its progress, our hearts are immensely reassured and we look with faith into the future for fresh testimonies and other occasions of thanksgiving.

But I confess to you that when I consider the barrier of racial prejudice I am in need of all the encouragement which the past has to offer. Of all the enemies to the life and love of a redeeming Lord this was one of the earliest encountered. At no period has it ever ceased to be a menace. Many times in its presence Christianity has seemed powerless while a hybrid counterfeit has paraded unashamed within the limitations it has dictated. Ere the glow of the vision of the risen Lord had faded from the faces of the first disciples, Peter found himself brought to the great issue. The story lies written in the Book of Acts. It is a most instructive narrative, disclosing in its development that spirit which has chiefly characterized race prejudice ever since. There comes to Peter, as you will recall, on the night before

the arrival of Cornelius a vivid dream in which he sees food of all sorts prepared for him to eat. This is accompanied by the command, "Arise and eat." And now note the answer. For it states to the end of time the basic temper of race prejudice, "Not so, for I never have."

What can be said in reply? Just what Peter is represented as hearing. "What God hath cleansed, call not thou unclean." In other words, it makes no difference what you have done, or even what you think; square your conduct with divine sanctions, not with narrow human limitations. But the spirit evinced by Peter's words continued its obstructive tactics. It laid wet blankets upon the flaming ardor of Paul and when lack of support failed to check him the advocates of racial prejudice drew the sword of bloody violence. It was a Roman order which sent Paul to the scaffold but it was a narrow Judaic hatred of a gospel in which there was neither barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free that first delivered him into captivity.

In the centuries that have since elapsed there have been long periods when the conditions did not afford encouragement to this ancient defect in temper. Merely national distinctions do not stir it to full activity. It is true that the pleasure-loving, refined Italians of the famous cities where art burgeoned into the luxuriant forms of mediaeval splendor looked with a measure of disgust upon the ruder Germans whose castles were simply arsenals or storehouses for plunder. But the Teutonic Emperor dictated terms beneath the shadow of Rome's triumphal arches too often for Italy to despise her northern neighbors, while the soldiers of the free Italian cities were so often encamped upon the Rhine that a sense of comradeship developed.

It was not until the expansion of western civilization and the consequences of a shameful traffic brought the white skinned people face to face with the black and the yellow that all the rancor of Jewish

prejudice became reincarnated, and the slumbering passions that jeopardized the gospel in the first, rose up and stood athwart its progress in the 19th and 20th centuries. Here in America has the issue become most intense and at one point of the extended battle line the outcome is peculiarly in doubt.

Before speaking of that let me allude to the other aspects of the situation. There are not a few good church people everywhere to whom people of other tongues and races are not "folks like us," but dagoes, Bohunks and Sheenies. The contempt for these non-English speaking men and women is so genuine and deep as to be almost ludicrous. It becomes positively preposterous in the light of history. The good lady, who is vehement in her denunciation of "furriners" is ignorant of the fact that when her forbears were dirty pagans living in unclean hovels no better than the shanty of the Italians working on the new boulevard, the ancestors of these dagoes had already reached a wealth of art and refinement we have attained only at a few points. She simply does not know that the fellow in the boot black parlor comes from and is proud of a race that before her New Testament was written had already passed the high mark of a national glory whose achievements are the constant joy of civilization.

Now it must be said that when people begin to think of these things they cease to be so wise in their own conceits. The difficulty is not so much a deep seated race prejudice, although it appears so on the surface, but a dislike of the types in which another race impinges upon our own. One cannot but sympathize with the remark of a sweet broad-spirited lady of my acquaintance. "When I was riding the other day," she said, "in a trolley full of Italian workmen returning from their work, it did seem pretty hard to enter into the spirit of that fine hymn we sang the other Sunday, 'O brother man fold to thy heart thy brother.' "

The racial antipathy in such a case is not deep seated. It is only with the very ignorant that it continues when cleanliness and intelligence mark the foreigner. Hot water and soap and a boycott on garlic do wonders to sap the strength of this form of prejudice by destroying the real grounds of its existence. The stirring words of Mr. Schaufler's verse find a widespread response today.

O Genoese boy of the level brow,
Lad with the far-off dreamy eyes,
Astare at Manhattan's pinnacles now
In the first sweet hush of a glad surprise,
Within thy far off seer's eyes
I catch the gleam of the great emprise
That played on the Santa Maria's prow,
In that cold gray dawn four centuries gone,
When a world from the grave began to rise.
Caesar dreamed him a world ruled well,
Dante dreamed heaven out of hell,
Angelo took us there to dwell,
And you, are you of a different birth?

A more persistent form of the prejudice appears when representatives of the Asiatic peoples come into contact with the white race.

"Once," as Dr. H. Paul Douglass has keenly said, "the heathen was a perishing soul hard to get at—and we loved him. Later he became a consuming body, part of a world market, worshipping idols made in Connecticut and we tolerated him. Finally he has become a participating fellow in common civilization, a neighbor and we hate him."

Well, we still love him—under the American Board. We rejoice to send him the gospel if we can only send it 3,000 miles to him. The trouble comes when we don't have to send it further than some dozen

blocks, more or less. The issue is trying when he is a home missionary object. When the matter of being a "light bearer" is in question, we come out strong. When it is a matter of being a neighbor, we have something of the feeling of the noble lord in England who protested indignantly that churches had gotten to a pretty pass when religion was applied to a man's morals. As a matter of fact the feeling is often mutual. It would make for the reducing of our conceit if we always knew how the native of India or Japan or China looks upon us. There is in every land quite too much of the spirit of the man that, as Dr. Cadman said once "hugs a town pump and thinks he rules a nation." And the best corrective is an understanding of the other party's view. But, however that be, we find in our land today not a little deep seated antagonism to the yellow skinned peoples and a readiness to adopt towards them policies which we would not dare to advocate in dealing with Europe. Yet here again economic causes accentuate the prejudice and produce its worst manifestations. Where they do not exist, culture and common sense soften the rigor of our antagonisms. We have been coming to feel especially since Port Arthur and Mukden that the Japanese may teach even an American something, and it is slowly percolating through all but the most hopelessly provincial of us that a nation whose great teacher had left a complete system of ethics 500 years before Jesus walked in Galilee may have a greater destiny than to wash our collars and cuffs.

The real center of conflict is when black and white must live together. Then we learn what is the depth and height and length and breadth of this antagonism and we know the prejudice of race which passeth knowledge. There is little need to dwell upon the unpleasant details of the situation. The simple fact which is enough to give urgency to our thought is this, the black man does not receive from Christian white people in America the same chance that another white man has.

Why not?

Well, of course, the first thing we may say is that in many places the question would be asked in surprise, and in the expectation that no one could give a satisfactory answer. When Mr. Booker Washington visited the other side of the Atlantic it did not occur to anyone that his color constituted any barrier to social contact, much less to Christian courtesy. He must needs return to America which he served as few men since the foundation of our government have served it, to America where he poured out his strength for the clean uplift of a section of our citizenship, he must come back here after associating with men high in worldly estate abroad, to find that his acceptance of an invitation to dinner by a leading American occasioned the possibility of a political volcano.

Why not? Why should I not invite a man whose ancestors flourished war clubs in Africa to my table as freely as one whose ancestors flourished them in Europe, provided that in culture and courtesy both men are now of the same type?

Anthropology has not made out any conclusive case against the Negro. It has not been proved nor can it be that he is any less of a man potentially than white, yellow or red skinned men. What can be proved is that the Negro having been under the influence of civilization a shorter time than the Anglo-Saxon and the Slav, the race as a whole is less developed. If you grade men on the basis of 100% more whites than Negroes would be 50% above 1%, and more Negroes than whites below. But let it be noted first that the bottom of hell is level, where both races furnish occupants and that some Negroes share with the whites the highest attainments.

Why then should we not treat the men of black skin just as we treat those of white, governing our habits of social contact by exactly the same principles in both instances.

Quoted from Dr. Douglass' "Christian Reconstruction in the South."

We do not invite the degraded American to our dinner table. We use what means we can to help him. We do ask the American whose habits conform to the requirements of modern social amenities, if occasion arises so to do. Why should we not ask the black American if he is a similar type?

Because—this is the oft repeated retort—because if you do he has the right to marry your daughter. This is the final and crushing reply. It is supposed to settle the issue and to end the debate.

But in a world where eating and drinking on one hand and marrying and giving in marriage on the other, are still distinguishable things I have the temerity to ask even in the face of this supposed invincible outburst of logic, why need I give my daughter to my colored guest? For the fact is that even if intermarriage is justifiable upon biological grounds it is impossible yet to contemplate it upon social grounds. The loss to the white under existing conditions is incalculably great. So that while most elements in a plan of ordinary social relationships involve no unpleasant consequences, marriage would bring unhappiness. Why should we not draw the line then, not guided by the theory of racial prejudice, but only by the facts of an actual situation? I would not wish my daughter to marry a man who proposed to spend the remainder of his life out of touch of civilization on the Antarctic ice cap studying the movements of the glaciers. His environment would be an impossible one into which to take my daughter. But I would not hesitate to ask him to dinner.

No, the cause of the present attitude of white towards black is not scientific, certainly not Christian (except for those who set the writer of the Noah story on a plane with Jesus), and above all, not reasonable. It is occasioned by racial prejudice, stimulated by economic pressure, and inflamed by political fears. Let me say most emphatically that

as regards this issue of reasonable social recognition, the black man has nothing of importance to gain, nothing to lose. He will be far happier spending his time getting something to eat fit for his own table, than clamoring for the right to sit at his white neighbor's board. Booker Washington's genius did not err in his advice to his people to live so as to merit respect and to be sure that if they deserved it the man who sought to insult them injured and degraded himself, not them.

No, the black man, if he is wise, will so order his ways that social recognition is unimportant. But the urgency of the situation is its challenge to Christianity. I have dwelt on the social aspect only because the absence of Christianity is exposed there. And believe me, it is a critical question for American Christianity whether or no it shall be permanently halted by the antipathies of race. Many an event must waken our profound anxiety. Some years ago a great convention of Sunday Schools, heralded as the mightiest gathering of its sort ever seen, included as one of its features a parade of the delegates. It so happened that some colored people were in attendance. When, however, they proposed to march through the streets of the capital of a free country in company with the rest of the delegates, white followers of a Lord who ate with sinners and outcasts and the hated Samaritans indignantly declared they would not tolerate such a proceeding. I venture the assertion that such a repudiation of the principles of Jesus did far more harm to the cause of Christ in America than all the bambast and blare of the days that followed could possibly do good.

Such circumstances show what the struggle really is. For though we could cover Africa with missionary stations, though we could send a teacher for every black boy and girl in this land, though we have amazing faith that missions are the saving power of the church but

have not love, it profiteth us nothing. Love will refuse to be denied by racial barriers. We must have love on her own universal terms or accept a counterfeit.

Prejudice cannot be battered down by argument. It cannot be caught by logic. It can at last be dissolved in the passion of real Christianity. That passion, thank God, has found ere this hearts big enough for its enthronement. Men and women have gone forth to misunderstanding, abuse and ostracism swayed by a conception of Christianity which had outlawed compromise on elemental truths. Their names are written in light and their achievement provokes reverent homage. But they without us shall not be made perfect. Of what avail now our splendid organization, our increasing equipment for service, our vision broadened by the spirit of the age, if being brought face to face with manhood under a black skin our eyes are holden and we perceive it not? Of what account to send the gospel to Africa if we propose to repudiate it at our own doors?

Under such conditions figures of progress are a poor consolation. They may well be left to the statisticians while we return and listen to the prophetic voices of those to whom there has been one Lord and Saviour for all.

When the line of battle is long and the numbers great, real progress is slow. Uncounted dollars for bursting shrapnel and thousands on thousands of human lives are paid as toll for a few hundred yards of blood soaked trenches on the soil of France. Advance will be not more rapid as the spirit of a brotherly Christ refuses to be halted by the embattled forces of racial prejudice. The crucial question is whether or not we believe in the crusade. Is there deep in our hearts the invincible courage of the conviction that the gospel of Jesus is adequate? Can he if lifted up, draw all men to himself? From this insistent query there is no escape.

Upon those who cherish no uncertainty about this our cause rests today. It is in safe hands. God is in the midst of them and they shall not be moved. But they must be reinforced. They will not hesitate to die to the last man ere they surrender, but such glory for them would be irretrievable shame for the rest of us. By their sides where the passion of Christ binds hearts in unconquerable purpose let us take our places.

We are still reminded that Jesus of Nazareth had a sympathy larger than race as well as a vision wider than national boundaries. From his immortal lips fell the parable of "the least of these my brethren," and if it shall be our honor to keep the faith we shall repeal no word of his gospel and we shall follow unhesitatingly the sacrificial steps of the early church.

"He saved the sheep, the goats he doth not save"

So rang Tertullian's sentence on the side

Of that un pitying Phrygian sect which cried,

"Him can no fount of fresh forgiveness lave.

"Who sins, once washed by the baptismal wave."

So spake the fierce Tertullian, but she sighed,

The infant church! of love she felt the tide

Stream on her from her Lord's yet recent grave.

And then she smiled, and in the Catacombs

With eyes suffused but heart inspired true,

On those walls subterranean where she hid

Her head mid ignominy, death and tombs,

She her Good Shepherd's hasty image drew,

And on his shoulders not a lamb, a kid.